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AUTHOR Mucha, Janusz
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the processes of mutual adaptation by ethnic groups in modern multi-ethnic societies. It focuses on relations between minorities and the dominant group. Various theories regarding these relations, including a definition of ethnic groups, are reviewed and a synthesis is advanced. This theory is based on a conflict model of society and considers the roles of coercion, differentiation, conflict, cultural patterns, and social structures in the adaptive processes of ethnic groups. The problem of overlapping or intersecting economic, political and cultural contradictions is analyzed. It is hypothesized that these contradictions will force certain changes in the way a majority treats minority groups, that these changes are connected with changes in the economic and political status of an ethnic group, and that the improvement of a minority group's situation will enlarge its common ground with the dominant group. (Author/AP)

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# ETHNIC CONFLICT AND ADAPTATION: CONFLICT ANALYSIS OF MULTI-ETHNIC NATIONS FORMATION

Janusz Mucha
Instytut Scojologii
Uniwersytet Jagielloński
Kraków, Poland

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Janusz Mucha
Instytut Socjologii
Uniwersytet Jagielloński
Kraków, Poland

# ETHNIC CONFLICT AND ADAPTATION: CONFLICT ANALYSIS OF MULTI-ETHNIC NATIONS FORMATION (1)

## 1. Introduction

This paper is intended as a presentation of a proposal for an analysis of the processes of mutual adaptation of ethnic groups in modern multi-ethnic societies. In the course of the analysis the conflict model of society will be adapted.

By the conflict model of society I understand here a conceptual model, the basic assumptions of which state that the contradictions of group interests and intergroup conflicts are the fundamental features of societies. By modern multi-ethnic societies, I mean industrial societies characterized by considerable social mobility, both horizontal and vertical. The market economy weakens or dissolves old regional ethnic ties creating various substitutes for them. The educational system, military service, etc., reduce the isolation of ethnic group members and incorporate them in the general political system. "Ethnic problems" of these countries may foreshadow "ethnic problems" of other multi-ethnic societies if they follow the same lines of development as the Euro-American societies.

## 2. Ethnic Group

By ethnic group I understand a group with distinctive cultural features and with consciousness of common origin. Particularly important among the cultural patterns may be language and religion; "objective" indicators of common origin are frequently

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features considered as racial. Therefore, I shall distinguish ethnic groups on the basis of three different features: religion, race /socially, not physically understood/ and language /Gordon 1964: 28; Morris 1968: 167; Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 4, 18/. A common factor of all groups considered as ethnic is the development of a "sense of peoplehood" - "the social-psychological element of a special sense of both ancestral and future oriented identification with group"/Gordon 1964: 29/. For Glazer and Moynihan this common factor means "that they all become effective foci for group mobilization for concrete political ends challenging the primacy for such mobilization of class on the one hand and nation on the other"/1975: 18/.

Ethnic groups have to be treated as INTERESTS GROUPS. In the past they generally claimed only recognition of their own religion, language, and customs, but now they also demand explicitly equal economic and political rights /Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 7/. The problem of relations between ethnic groups becomes then a problem of opposition or reconciliation of fundamental group interests.

The number and diversity of features distinguishing ethnic groups means that it is possible for different types of ethnic identification to overlap or intersect. Also an ethnic identification may occur at different levels - religious, national, or racial.

Such a broad concept of ethnic groups encompasses not only minority groups but also the dominant /majority/ group in the multi-ethnic society. Obviously, the terms "minority" and "majority" do not have quantitative connotations here. By a majority or dominant group I mean an ethnic group that introduced and consolidated its own economic, political, and cultural structures in its territory of the present multi-ethnic country and secured

state protection for them. The dominant group, and usually other groups too, identify the political institutions and culture of this group with the political institutions and culture of the new nation already formed of developing in a given territory. By ethnic minorities I mean all other ethnic groups of a given society. Their influence on what is considered to be the new national culture, political institutions, and structures of the state is less.

In general, I shall focus on relations between minorities and a dominant group. The important problem of the relations among minority groups themselves will only be mentioned.

3. Processes of Mutual Adaptation of Minority Groups and a Dominant Group

Due to structural differences between a dominant group and minorities and to their unequal strength and influence with regard to their contribution to the shape of the whole society, the process of mutual adaptation of ethnic groups in a modern multi-ethnic society is not symmetric. Though it is not completely one-sided, majorities cause more significant changes of minorities than vice versa. This intergenerational process takes varied forms: assimilation to the dominant group, "melting" or rather "transmuting melting pot", and ethnic pluralism. The process is very complicated and not at all linear. Its complexity results from various interrelated factors, some of which are as follows:

/1/ Sensitivity to the economic and political situation in the country.

/2/ Inner, manifold differentiation of ethnic groups.

/3/ An overlap of contradiction of economic and political interests and contradiction of "cultural-ethnic" interests.

/4/ The coincidence of structural contradictions between groups with the development and maintenence of stereotypes and prejudice.

/5/ The sequences of disappearance and revival of ethnic consciousness of minority groups.

/6/ The influence of the state, which sometimes supports assimilation of some or all minority groups and sometimes favors or supports the segregation of certain groups, and sometimes follows a pluralistic policy.

/7/ The difference between the situation of immigrant minorities, which often arrive with the intention to assimilate, and the situation of autochthoneus minorities which ordinarily do not want to accept the legality of a dominant group's rule.

/8/ The difference between the situation of groups which a dominant group tries to segregate because their racial and cultural features are completely different, and the situation of groups which a dominant group tries to assimilate because their features are similar to its own.

/9/ The influence of relations among minority groups themselves on the relations between these groups and a dominant one.

/10/ The difference between democratic opportunities /understood as equality of chances for development/ with regard only to individual members of minority groups and with regard to whole groups.

/11/ New flows of immigrants that cause a revival of problems of ethnic relations and a change of relations between groups that have arrived earlier.

/12/ The appeal of states from which some ethnic groups originate to the national loyalty of their members.

Let me call attention to the fact that all phenomena enumerated here as examples are linked with a number of opposed sys-

tems of values, contradictions of interests, and other sources of inter-group conflicts. The processes of mutual adaptation of ethnic groups seem to be in essence conflict processes. Due to their complexity, none of the simple theories that have been used to describe them up till now was completely relevant. They all seem, however, to describe accurately some stages or aspects of the processes of mutual adaptation. If treated in this way, they might appear useful. The scope of their adequacy as regards reality however, may be different in various multi-ethnic societies. In the United States, for example, the theory of assimilation in a narrow sense /"Anglo-conformity"/ seems to describe to some extent the process of superficial acculturation according to Gordon's understanding of this term, as well as ethnic group acceptance of the political structures and institutions of the society /which occurs quickly, although with some difficulties/. "Melting pot" theories may be relevant either in their less general version of the "transmuting melting pot", or in Gordon's /1964: 130/ version in which he says that "American society has come to be composed of a number of "pots" or "subsocieties"", what means that there are separate milieus in which cultural systems of ethnic groups intermingle. Finally the failure of "structural assimilation" to occur suggests that the "structural pluralism" model is relevant to describe the American society. Let us notice that structural pluralism may be consistent with cultural assimilation; neither is it necessarily opposed to the conception of a multiplicity of "melting pots". Various theories, if interpreted in the way presented above, suggest that modernization weakens some and strengthens other aspects of ethnic loyalty and consciousness. At least in America assimilation and fusion do not occur if they are understood as processes that re-

sult in a complete melting of one kind of group and its culture into the others. "To abandon the notion that assimilation is a self-completing process will make it possible to study the forces /especially at the level of cultural and social structure/ which facilitate or hinder assimilation or, conversely, the forces which generate the sense of ethnic and racial identity even within the homogenizing conflines of modern society"/Metzger 1971: 644/.

Let me try now to formulate a fourth, to a certain extent synthetic and obviously simplified, interpretation of the situation in modern multi-ethnic societies. This model will be more adequate for one type of society and less adequate for other, but in my opinion this depends on specific conditions existing in a given society. I assume, then, that all minority groups are assimilated to a certain extent to the culture of a dominant group. This kind of assimilation, even if it refers to immigrants who arrived with the intention of becoming indistinguishable members of their new fatherland, usually occurs by force, by means of intergroup conflicts. At least partially, it enables members of minority groups to take part in economic and political life of the country and to participate in the "nation-wide culture". This also provides a platform common to all ethnic groups for self-presentation, for group economic, political, and cultural competition, and for group involvement in and solution of conflicts. This "nation-wide core" /i.e., system of values, norms and institutions usually introduced by a dominant group/ accepted more or less voluntarily by ethnic groups that compose the whole society, in general, is not questioned by them afterwards. Moreover, they usually refer to it while trying to solve

contradictions and conflicts. In the "nation-wide culture" there are at least some patterns originating from the cultures of minority groups, usually the more important minority groups that can exert strong pressure on the dominant group. Only in this very limited sense is the "melting pot" achieved. The whole system of cultural patterns of ethnic groups is not composed merely of the "nation-wide core", however, and the share of different groups in the formation of this core varies. Therefore, accompanying partial acculturation we also have cultural and structural pluralism.

An adequate model of such a society is one in which the fundamental features of the society are considered to be differentiation, coercion /domination/, conflict and dynamics of cultural patterns and of social structure. Therefore, a conflict model would be useful for the analysis of complex processes of mutual adaptation of ethnic groups in a modern multi-ethnic society.

4. The Conflict Analysis of Multi-ethnic Societies

One of the main exponents of conflict model of society in contemporary sociology, Ralf Dahrendorf, maintains that "Every society is at every point subject to processes of change ..; displays at every point dissensus and conflict; .. is based on the coercion of some of its members by others; .. Every element in a society renders a contribution to its disintegration and change" /1972: 162/. These assumptions, as I have demonstrated above, can be related to multi-ethnic societies. Some of them are formulated almost explicitly by investigators of ethnic problems, who more and more often treat these problems similarly to other intergroup relations based on coercion and contradiction of interests /there is a number of books analysing ethnic

problems from the conflict perspective, e.g., Marx 1971/. In L.P. Metzger's opinion "majority - minority relations are in fact group relations ... and not merely relations between prejudices and victimized individuals. As such, they are implicated in the struggle for power and privilege in the society, and the theory of collective behavior and political sociology may be more pertinent to understand them than the theory of social mobility and assimilation"/1971: 644/. A similar but more formalistic standpoint is represented by R. Schermerhorn /1964: 240/. Quite similar seems Gordon's new analysis of assimilation processes /1975: 86,88/. According to Cynthia H. Enloe, ethnic movemensts reminded the investigators that integration does not occur merely by socialization, that in political systems coercion is also present /1973: 12/. Opposition and conflict then are not considered as passing phenomena.

The link between social contradictions and the dynamics of society is demonstrated, for instance, by Schermerhorn. In his opinion the investigation of ethnic relations means the application of the theory of social change to a limited but very important sphere in which processes of integration and conflict intermingle /1970: 55/.

In conflict models of society, important assumptions refer to social structure, i.e., to elemensts of a society and to relations that unite them. I shall mention here only those that I consider to be the most interesting for the analysis of multiethnic societies.

The authors of conflict models of society look for interrelations of /1/ conflicts, /2/ cohesion of the parties involved in conflict, and /3/ cohesion of the whole societies. On the bases of their investigations it is possible to formulate a hypo-

thesis: /other things being equal/ the stronger the cohesion of a given party, the more likely it is to realize its goals in the conflict. If the various minority groups act in concert and have a high degree of cohesion among themselves, they are more likely to be successful in their struggles with the dominant group to achieve their goals. If both minorities and majority are cohesive /or only the party that is interested in change of the system/, conflict results in destabilization of the system. In case the groups are already involved in a conflict, the development of cohesion means a simultaneous development of a conflict.

I have passed now to another important question. That is the problem of cohesion of social entities. In conflict models societies may be either rigid /totalitarian/ or flexible. The former is one, in which it is more difficult to reveal the contradictions of interests. Various unsolved contradictions gather and accumulate. When social control is not able to cope with them any more, one violent conflict breaks out and destroys the entity. The latter is a society that permits any contradiction to be revealed, even in a form of conflict. Contradictions are not able to cumulate in this case. Conflict, if it does not destroy one or more of the parties - and in fact it is usually too weak to do so - causes the development of new norms, methods of regulation, etc. The typology discussed above is connected with another one. In one type of society /usually the rigid ones/ various contradictions and conflicts overlap. This means that the same groups represent various opposite interests which cumulate. About possible consequences of such a situation I have written above. In another type of society /flexible/ various

contradictions and conflicts intersect - two groups may have some opposed interests and some common interests which may be opposed, however, to the interests of a third group. Economic contradictions might intersect, then, with the contradictions of cultural-ethnic interests. This causes a complex interplay of loyalties. When ethnic loyalty is as strong as economic loyalty, these contradictions do not lead towards conflicts that destroy the society.

Let me analyse now multi-ethnic societies from the point of view of the cumulation or intersection of contradictions. I assume that the most important factor for the change of global societies is economic, i.e., economic contradictions. The investigators of ethnic problems seem to share a similar opinion. They analyze the relationship between the economic and ethnic structures. Thirty years ago S. Person stated: "Perhaps the most striking aspect of the immigrant problem in industrial America has been the tendency on the part of the native American to transform the economic and social conflicts of industialism into cultural conflicts wherever the immigrant has been involved. Cultural conflict in turn has almost always been expressed in terms of Americanization" /1944: 52/. This means, first, an overlap of two types of interests and, secondly, that it was much more convenient for a dominant group to interpret conflicts in terms of domination that had sufficient legitimacy. An identical view was expressed in 1974 by Gans. Also E. Bonacich argues, that "an understanding of the interests of the white working class and its power to implement them is of major importance for understanding race relations before Civil War"/1975: 601; see also 1976/. All of them think that group ethnic identity is stronger than the economic one. The same problem, however, can be viewed

from an opposite standpoint. For example, L. Wirth observed that the demand for cultural autonomy by ethnic groups is always linked with the fight for political and economic interests /1970:37/.

Generally in conflict models it is assumed that in every society there is an inviolable core, a set of values, norms and institutions, that are not questioned by groups representing opposite interests. The stronger and broader is this core, the more cohesive is the whole society, in spite of the contradictions and conflicts. If a group accepts this core, it can fight for its own interests with no intention to destroy or leave the broader group, and, to a certain extent, with no fear of being excluded from it. It seems that a similar phenomenon occurs also in multi-ethnic societies. A conflict between groups that are uncertain about their fate - e.g., immigrant groups having no rights - and a dominant group differs from ethnic conflicts between groups that consider themselves to be elements - with full rights - of a new society. It is possible to present a number of instances. For example, in the United States, "A study of the attitudes of Negroes in the army during the last war has suggested that those Negroes who were most positively motivated toward war and most ready to volunteer for combat were also the ones who tended to be the most militant on the racial issues"/Vander Zanden 1963: 184/.

Let me pass now to problems more important from my point of view, i.e., to the relations between /1/ a conflict /contradiction/; /2/ structure; and /3/ change. In conflict models it is assumed that a conflict may lead to changes within the system /which means the adaptation of this system to new conditions/ or to changes of the system itself. In general, this depends on the structural features of society. According to L. Wirth, new groups

of immigrants first demand toleration and autonomy - the recognition of the separateness of their interests. The manifestation of these inconsistencies is an important initial step towards assimilation of these groups if the majority allows assimilation /1970: 42/. I have already mentioned that conflicts may actually be stimulated when there is a high degree of similarity socially and culturally between the minority group and the dominant group, for they may have highly similar goals and conception of rights. Conflicts may then indicate high /though no complete/ social integration.

The overlap of economic, political, and cultural-ethnic contradictions and conflicts does not lead toward quiet changes. In certain conditions it may cause an outbreak of a cumulated conflict that can change totally the character of a system or it may result in complete or temporary elimination of some groups from the system - for instance, the internment of persons of Japanese descent in the United States, Canada and Peru during World War II or expulsion of the Chinese from the regions of increasing economic competition with the whites in the United States /see: Yuan 1970: 137; Petersen 1970; Caudill and Devos 1970/. In any case, it causes the weakening of a system and a slower pace of assimilation. The intersection of contradictions will probably cause more quiet changes within the system. If intersecting contradictions are equally strong, a complete stabilization of a system occurs. If, however, one of the contradictions appears to be stronger, conflicts will emerge and cause changes, weakened though, to a larger extent, by another contradiction. It seems that in modern multi-ethnic societies we generally have a situation with an overlap of contradictions. Probably this explains the intensity with which ethnic conflicts appear from

time to time, under the banner of culture-ethnicity, but with more serious contradictions at their base. Probably the following hypothesis may be formulated: if in a given situation the contradictions of economic and cultural-ethnic interests overlap, the conflicts that result will probably force certain changes in the way a majority treats minority groups. The scope and speed of these changes depends on the relative power of both groups. Generally, however, because it is harder and harder to suppress protests completely, the minority group receives more and more cultural ethnic rights. These changes are sometimes connected, though not to an equal extent, with the changes of the economic and political situation of a group. The realization merely of the cultural-ethnic interests of a minority group does not seem to solve the problem, because, as I have already said, nowadays the separateness of economic and political interests is considered one of the features that define an ethnic group. I accept, then, a hypothesis that due to conflicts the situation of minority groups in multi-ethnic societies will take a turn for the better. The improvement of their situation will enlarge the scope of what they have in common with the dominant group, and will bring participation of these groups in the structure and culture of the society as a whole. This cannot, however, mean only assimilation; it has to mean also a redefinition of the common core of modern multi-ethnic societies. The greater the extent to which various contradictions overlap and the greater the ability of minority groups to threaten the system, the more radical and dramatic this redefinition will be. In general, the changes of this type are not quick. If such changes occur in societies in which the contradictions intersect, they are particularly slow.

Finally, let me also discuss what can and what cannot be described by a conflict model, what can and what cannot be predicted on its basis. In this model it is assumed that in every society there is always a certain differentiation . It is not maintained, however, that the same type of differentiation exists in xevery society. They may differ in terms of contradictions of interests, conflicts, antagonisms, etc. This model cannot serve then as a basis for ready prescriptions referring to the future of ethnic differentiation and the relations between ethnic groups. Prescriptions that would eliminate the necessity of additional empirical research on social processes are not feasible. If investigations and explanations are based on a conflict model, it is impossible to eliminate the possibility that in the future ethnic problems will disappear from societies that are multi-ethnic nowadays, and that many important functions that are performed today by ethnic groups will be acquired by other types of groups. At the present moment, however, there are no sufficient grounds to infer such a possibility.

The problem of the very far future - several generations off - is, however, interesting enough to devote several remarks to it. Probably ethnic differentiation will play an important role in societies as long as /1/ an ethnic group is the basis for a sense of peoplehood; /2/ this differentiation overlaps other important types of differentiation; /3/ economic, social, and regional structures generate conflicts, and finally, /4/ there is no satisfactory consensus of minority groups and the dominant group on the scope of domination of the "nation-wide culture", on the composition of this culture, and on the possibilities of development of minority group cultures. Obviously, the last of these factors generates conflicts. One group constantly dominates

and tries to preserve this domination; others constantly strive after a certain change of the status quo - i.e., the inclusion, to a larger extent, of their own patterns in the system of patterns composing the culture of the entity. The consensus resulting from conflict would not be static, then, but would rather be in a constant process of increasing the importance of the nation-wide culture that includes, however, to a larger and larger extent, cultural patterns of minority groups. At least this kind of hypothesis may be formulated on the basis of an analysis of multi-ethnic societies, in which the conflict perspective is applied. The relevance of this hypothesis should be verified by empirical research. In societies that have been multi-ethnic for a long period, it would be possible to analyse the changes of the consciousness of affiliation to the nation among ethnic groups which compose a given society, of the consciousness of the nation-wide culture and of the origin of its various elements. It would be possible to investigate to what extent the assumption is true that probable changes of national consciousness and changes of nation-wide culture are results of clashes between groups striving after the satisfaction of their cultural-ethnic interests. Economic and political interests related to ethnic issues may also play an important role.

There are also "external" reasons why a complete absorption of minority groups by a majority should not be anticipated in the near future. One of them is the constant immigration to industrial societies of ethnically alien labour forces, especially in times of prosperity. One the one hand it creates a common ground fo all groups that arrived earlier, and on the other, it causes the revival of contradictions that have not yet been solved. Another reason that exists outside the system is the

increase of interests in certain ethnic groups by states from which these groups originated. These "states of origin" accept the new situation, new orders of loyalty of these groups, even new national loyalties, but they maintain the sense of peoplehood shared by members of these groups. Both of these reasons are external, as I have already mentioned. It seems to me, however, that they are really important . Besides, they are results of some conflicts and are the causes that are giving rise to other ones.

NOTE

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